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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between mentally retarded children's social status and their social behavior as perceived by their peers in the mainstream classroom. For purposes of comparison, the relationship between nonretarded children's social status and their perceived behavior was also assessed. Sociometric surveys were conducted in 51 third though sixth grade mainstream classrooms in order to identify accepted and rejected mentally retarded and nonretarded children. Peer assessments of social behavior were also obtained, and the results were used to classify subjects into groups (sociable, sensitive/isolated, aggressive/disruptive, or some combination). Results revealed that rejected, mentally retarded children were perceived by their nonretarded peers as engaging in aggressive/disruptive and or sensitive/isolated behavior. In contrast, accepted mentally retarded children were perceived as sociable. The same relationships were found for nonretarded accepted and rejected children. Factor analyses of the peer assessments revealed that nonretarded children used similar dimensions in assessing the social behavior of their mentally retarded and nonretarded peers. (Author)

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Relationship between Social Status and Peer Assessment of Social Behavior among Mentally Retarded and Nonretarded Children

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between mentally retarded children's social status and their social behavior as perceived by their peers in the mainstream classroom. For purposes of comparison, the relationship between nonretarded children's social status and perceived behavior was also assessed.

Sociometric surveys were conducted in 51 third through sixth grade mainstream classrooms, in order to identify accepted and rejected mentally retarded and nonretarded children. Peer assessments of social behavior were also obtained, and the results used to classify subjects into groups (sociable, sensitive/isolated, aggressive/disruptive, or some combination).

Results of crosstabulation analysis showed that rejected mentally retarded children were perceived by their nonretarded peers as engaging in aggressive/disruptive and/or sensitive/isolated behavior. In contrast, accepted mentally retarded children were perceived as sociable. The same relationships were found for nonretarded accepted and rejected children, confirming previous research. Factor analyses of the peer assessments revealed that nonretarded children used similar dimensions in assessing the social behavior of their mentally retarded and nonretarded peers.

AIMS

1. To examine the relationship between social status and peer perceptions of social behavior among mentally retarded and nonretarded children in mainstream classrooms.

2. To determine whether nonretarded children in mainstream classrooms view the social behavior of their mentally retarded and nonretarded peers along the same dimensions.

SUBJECTS

Subjects were chosen from among 978 nonretarded and 193 mentally retarded children in 51 third through sixth grade classrooms in 20 schools. Final sample sizes were (n = 249) nonretarded children (158 accepted and 91 rejected) and (n = 71) mentally retarded children (31 accepted and 40 rejected). Of the mentally retarded children, 39 were males (16 accepted and 23 rejected) and 32 were female (15 accepted and 17 rejected); of the nonretarded children, 126 were males (87 accepted and 39 rejected) and 123 were females (71 accepted and 52 rejected).

INSTRUMENTS

Social Status was determined using the How I Feel Towards Others (HIFTO) sociometric nomination procedure (Kaufman, Agard, & Semmel, 1985). Children's responses on the HIFTO were standardized by class and sex and used to identify accepted and rejected mentally retarded and nonretarded children. (See table at right for criteria for acceptance and rejection.)

Peer Assessments of Social Behavior were obtained using a modified version of the Revised Class Play (RCP) peer assessment instrument (Masten, Morrison, & Pellegrini, 1985). A factor analysis was conducted and cluster scores computed for each child on each factor. Children's scores were then ranked on each factor, and the highest one/third of each group of children (mentally retarded and nonretarded) used to classify the accepted and rejected children as *sociable, aggressive/disruptive, sensitive/isolated, or some combination of the above.*

Criteria for Acceptance and Rejection.

	Acceptance	Rejection
Mentally Retarded	**+1.0 >= z >= -1.0** *on standardized "Friend" nominations*	**z >= +1.0** *on standardized "Not a Friend" nominations*
Non-Mentally Retarded	**z >= +.5** *on standardized "Friend" nominations*	**z >= +.5** *on standardized "Not a Friend" nominations*

NOTE. "Controversial" children, i.e., those who qualified as both "Accepted" and "Rejected" were dropped from analyses.

RESULTS

1. No differences were found in the factor structure of the Revised Class Play (RCP) for nonretarded children's assessments of their mentally retarded and nonretarded peers in mainstream classrooms.

2. Mentally retarded and nonretarded children who were accepted were perceived by their peers as exhibiting predominantly sociable behavior.

3. Mentally retarded and nonretarded children who were rejected were perceived by their peers as exhibiting predominantly aggressive/disruptive and/or sensitive/isolated behavior.

4. No differences were found in the relationship between social status and peer perceptions of behavior for nonretarded and mentally retarded peers in mainstream classrooms.

Factor Structure of the Revised Class Play (RCP):

A Comparison of Two Studies.

Factor	*O'Keefe, et al*		*Masten, et al*	
	Regular Education Children's Nominations of		School	
	NMR	MR	A	B
I. SOCIABILITY-LEADERSHIP				
a. Someone You Can Trust	.79	.75	.76	.69
b. Has Many Friends	.73	.72	.83	.72
c. Plays Fair	.72	.80	.67	.62
d. Good Sense of Humor	.76	.74	.80	.70
e. Will Wait Turn	.67	.72	.55	.46
f. Helps Others	.78	.53	.75	.73
g. Likes to Play with Others Rather than Alone	.52	.68	.63	.63
h. Polite	.72	.65	.66	.70
i. Everyone Likes to be With	.79	.66	.85	.75
j. Makes New Friends Easily	.78	.72	.76	.71
k. Usually Happy	.64	.75	.62	.55

Factor	*O'Keefe, et al*		*Masten, et al*	
	Regular Education Children's Nominations of		School	
	NMR	MR	A	B
AGGRESSIVE-DISRUPTIVE				
a. Gets into a lot Fights	.77	.73	.78	.82
b. Loses Temper Easily	.76	.72	.78	.72
c. Shows off a Lot	.76	.75	.73	.61
d. Interrupts when Others are Speaking	.68	.68	.70	.62
e. Too Bossy	.83	.78	.84	.82
f. Picks on Others	.84	.76	.84	.85
g. Teases Others too Much	.84	.64	.83	.83
III. SENSITIVE-ISOLATED				
a. Rather Play Alone than with Others	.67	.72	.66	.65
b. Often left Out	.80	.83	.77	.74
c. Feelings get Hurt Easily	.73	.79	.74	.60
d. Trouble Making Friends	.61	.76	.55	.53
e. Shy	.61	.67	.49	.46
f. Can't Get Others to Listen	.64	.69	.52	.55
g. Usually Sad	.75	.67	.71	.66

Cross-Tabulation of Class Play Status by Sociometric Status.

	SOCIOMETRIC STATUS			
	MR		NMR	
CLASS PLAY STATUS	Accepted n=31	Rejected n=40	Accepted n=158	Rejected n=91
Sociable	65%	0%	50%	4%
Sensitive/Isolated and Sociable	3%	8%	4%	0%
Aggressive	7%	23%	11%	21%
Aggressive and Sensitive/Isolated	3%	30%	3%	34%
Sensitive/Isolated	7%	15%	8%	32%
Sociable and Aggressive	7%	0%	7%	2%
Non-Extreme	10%	25%	18%	7%

Cross-Tabulation of Class Play Status by Sociometric Status:

A Comparison of Two Studies.

	SOCIOMETRIC STATUS			
	O'Keefe, et al, 1991 MR		Hymel et al, 1983 NMR	
CLASS PLAY STATUS	Accepted n=31	Rejected n=40	Popular n=28	Unpopular n=46
Sociable	65%	0%	55%	2%
Sensitive/Isolated and Sociable	3%	8%	3%	0%
Aggressive	7%	23%	3%	24%
Aggressive and Sensitive/Isolated	3%	30%	2%	17%
Sensitive/Isolated	7%	15%	2%	26%
Sociable and Aggressive	7%	0%	0%	0%
Non-Extreme	10%	25%	26%	33%

CONCLUSIONS

1. Nonretarded children in mainstream classrooms use similar dimensions in assessing the social behavior of their mentally retarded and nonretarded peers.

2. Both mentally retarded and nonretarded children who are accepted are perceived by their nonretarded peers as exhibiting predominantly sociable behavior.

3. Both mentally retarded and nonretarded children who are rejected are perceived by their nonretarded peers as exhibiting primarily aggressive/disruptive and/or sensitive/isolated behavior.